DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 351 CG 025 753

AUTHOR Werstlein, Pamela O.
TITLE Fostering Counselors' Development in Group Supervision. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CG-94-19
PUB DATE Apr 94
CONTRACT RR93002004
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Counselors; *Counselor Training; *Group Counseling; *Professional Development; *Supervision; *Supervisory Methods
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest focuses on issues of group supervision of counselors and counselor trainees. It begins by describing the merits of group supervision, noting that group supervision is unique in that growth is aided by the interactions occurring between group members. Collaborative learning is identified as a pivotal benefit of group supervision, with the supervisees having opportunities to be exposed to a variety of cases, interventions, and approaches to problem-solving in the group. Models of group supervision are briefly summarized. The group supervision format requires that supervisors be prepared to use their knowledge of group process. Based on existing group supervision literature, and small group literature, a set of guidelines are offered to supervisors who wish to address process in group supervision. The digest concludes that the integration of knowledge and experience is greatly enhanced by group supervision. (NB)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

April 1994 EDO-CG-94-19

# Fostering Counselors' Development in Group Supervision

*Pamela O. Werstlein*

### Merits of Group Supervision

Counselor's learning and continued development typically is fostered through concurrent use of individual and group supervision. Group supervision is unique in that growth is aided by the interactions occurring between groups members. Counselors do not function in isolation, so the group becomes a natural format to accomplish professional socialization and to increase learning in a setting that allows an experience to touch many. Supervision in groups provides an opportunity for counselors to experience mutual support, share common experiences, solve complex tasks, learn new behaviors, participate in skills training, increase interpersonal competencies, and increase insight (MacKenzie, 1990). The core of group supervision is the interaction of the supervisees.

Collaborative learning is a pivotal benefit, with the supervisees having opportunities to be exposed to a variety of cases, interventions, and approaches to problem solving in the group (Hillerband, 1989). By viewing and being viewed, actively giving and receiving feedback, the supervisee's opportunities for experimental learning are expanded; this characterizes group supervision as a social modeling experience. From a relationship perspective, group supervision provides an atmosphere in which the supervisee learns to interact with peers in a way that encourages self-responsibility and increases mutuality between supervisor and supervisee.

Groups allow members to be exposed to the cognitive process of other counselors at various levels of development (Hillerband, 1989). This exposure is important for the supervisee who learns by observing as well as speaking. Finally, hearing the success and the frustrations of other counselors gives the supervisee a more realistic model by which they can critique themselves and build confidence.

### Models of Group Supervision

Bernard and Goodyear (1992) summarized the typical foci of group supervision: didactic presentations, case conceptualization, individual development, group development, organization issues, and supervisor/supervisee issues. Models for conducting group supervision detail experiential affective approaches designed to increase the supervisees' self-concept and ability to relate to others, and/or cognitively focused activities, such as presenting cases which broadens the counselor's ability to conceptualize and problem-solve. Whie the literature provides information on how to conduct these activities, less obvious are the reasons why certain activities are selected and when the activities are most appropriate to use.

Borders (1991) offered a model that details reasons with the suggested activities. Groups may be used to increase feedback among peers through a structured format and assignment of roles (e.g., client, counselor, and other significant persons in client's life) while reviewing tapes of counseling sessions. "Role-taking" encourages supervisees to assume more responsibility in the group as feedback is offered from several viewpoints.

Models provide almost no attention to how the supervisor is to make judgments about the use of "group process." The supervisor has little guidance about how to use the collective nature of the group to foster counselor development.

Similarly, the development of the group has not been the focus of researchers — only a few empirical studies have been conducted to examine group supervision. Holloway and Johnston (1985), in a review of group supervision literature from 1967 to 1983, suggested that peer review, peer feedback, and personal insight are all possible to achieve while doing supervision in groups. Focus on the development of the group is not apparent in these studies, yet the term "group supervision" is defined with an emphasis on the use of group process to enhance learning.

### Group Supervision Process

As above indicates, the group supervision format requires that supervisors be prepared to use their knowledge of group process, although how this is to be done is very unclear. A recent naturalistic study of four groups across one semester provided some initial insights. Werstlein (1994) found that guidance and self-understanding were cited by supervisor and supervisees as the most important "therapeutic factors" (Yalom, 1985) present in their group. In addition, the initial stages of group development were apparent. Less noticeable were the later stages of group development which are characterized by higher risk behaviors that increase learning (Werstlein, 1994). Clearly, additional work is needed to clarify the process variables of group supervision and the role of the group leader (supervisor).

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### Supervisor as Group Leader

Based on existing group supervision literature and small group literature, the following guidelines are offered to supervisors who wish to address process in group supervision:

1. Five to eight supervisees meeting weekly for at least one and one half hours over a designated period of time (i.e., semester) provides an opportunity for the group to develop.
2. Composition of the supervision group needs to be an intentional decision made to include some commonalities and diversities among the supervisees (i.e., supervisee developmental level, experience level, or interpersonal compatibility).
3. A pre-planned structure is needed to detail a procedure for how time will be used and provide an intentional focus on content and process issues. This structure can be modified later in accordance with group's climate.
4. A pre-group session with supervisees can be used to "spell-out" expectations and detail the degree of structure. This session sets the stage for forming a group norm of self-responsibility and does not interfere with group development.
5. Supervisors may use "perceptual checks" to summarize and reflect what appear to be occurring in the here-and-now in the group. Validating observations with the supervisees is using process. Be active, monitor the number of issues, use acknowledgements, and involve all members.
6. Supervisees' significant experiences may be the result of peer interaction that involves feedback, support, and encouragement (Benshoff, 1992). Exploring struggles supports learning and problem-solving.
7. Bernard and Goodyear (1992) provided an excellent overview of the group supervision literature. Many ideas are available for structuring case presentations and the entire group sessions. Also, reviewing materials on group facilitation with a particular focus on dealing with process is essential.
8. Competition is a natural part of the group experience. Acknowledge its existence and frame the energy in a positive manner that fosters creativity and spontaneity.

In preparation for group supervision, communicate the following to the supervisees about how to use group process:

1. Learning increases as your listening and verbal involvement increases. Take risks and reveal your responses and thoughts.
2. Decrease your personalization of frustration by sharing with your peers. You will be surprised how often other supervisees are experiencing the same thoughts and feelings.
3. Intentionally look for similarities as you contemplate the relationships you have with your peers in the group with the relationships you are having with clients. Discuss similarities and differences.
4. Progress from client dynamics to counselor dynamics as you present your case. Know ahead of time what you want as a focus for feedback and ask directly.

### Summary and Conclusions

Integration of knowledge and experience is greatly enhanced by group supervision. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of a structure that outlines procedures for case presentation and supervisee participation; less obvious are approaches to address group development. It is essential the we fill in these gaps in the literature by systematically gathering data that establishes the unique aspects of using groups for supervision.

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*Pamela O. Werstlein, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC.*



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**This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Contract No. RR93002004. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of the U.S. Department of Education, OERI or ERIC/CASS.**

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